

Tempted and True

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Preacher: Matthew Capone

[0:00] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you today. A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us.

We're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community, and as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good, they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in His Word.

We're continuing this morning our study in the Gospel of Mark. You'll remember that the Gospel of Mark tells the story of Jesus in His life and His death and His resurrection, and as I've been telling you, when we look at Jesus, when we talk about Him, we're not talking about an abstraction or an idea or a theory.

We're not talking about a mythical figure. In fact, we're talking about a real man who lived in real time and real space, and so I've been giving you these facts about Jesus to help us remember just the earthiness and the reality of Him.

I've told you a couple times, two weeks ago, that He was born in Bethlehem, five to six miles south of Jerusalem. He grew up in Nazareth, 64 to 65 miles north of Jerusalem, and Jesus had brothers and sisters.

[1:17] I told you last week, He had at least seven. Now, why do I say at least seven? Why did I not give you an exact number? Well, it's because the Bible does not give us an exact number.

In Mark 6, verse 3, which we'll come to eventually, and also in Matthew 13, verse 55, we're told that Jesus has four brothers.

Their names are James and Joseph and Judas and Simon, so four brothers, and then He has sisters. So we're not told how many sisters He has. We just know that He has two or more.

Now, why the Bible doesn't tell us? My personal theory, which I can't prove, is that He had so many sisters that they couldn't name them all. We actually don't know exactly why it doesn't tell us. But just do the math with me.

So you've got four brothers. Jesus is number five. Then you've got two sisters, six and seven. So that's how we have at least Jesus being one of at least seven brothers and sisters. So as I said last week, if you have a lot of brothers and sisters, Jesus feels your pain.

[2:16] Okay, this morning we are coming. We're continuing going slowly through Mark chapter 1. We're coming now to verses 12 and 13. And we're asking our two questions for the gospel of Mark.

Our first question is, who is Jesus? And our second question is, how do we respond to Him? Who is Jesus? How do we respond to Him? And we saw at the very beginning, chapter 1, verses 1 through 8, that Jesus is the one who comes looking for our repentance.

So He comes as the physician. Remember, Jesus tells us in Mark chapter 2, verse 17, those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I've come to call the righteous, but sinners.

So He comes as the physician. We have to respond to Him by admitting our need. Remember, need is the price of admission for Jesus. Then last week we looked at Jesus' baptism, and we saw that Jesus is not just the physician.

He's also the king that we see from Psalm 2, the king who rules over the nations. And He's also the suffering servant from Isaiah. So He's so great on the one hand that the heavens are torn open for God to speak about Him.

[3 : 20] He's so humble on the other hand that He receives baptism from John the Baptist, who's unworthy even to untie His sandals. And so He stands in the place of sinners.

This morning as we come to verses 12 and 13, we're going to see, again in our question about Jesus, we're going to see Jesus' perfection, and we're also going to look at Jesus' power. We're going to look at His perfection and His power. And with that, I invite you to turn with me to the Gospel of Mark chapter 1, verse 12. You can turn there in your worship guide. You can turn there in your Bible.

You can turn there in your phone. Regardless of where you turn, remember that this is God's Word. And God tells us that His Word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold, and it's sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb.

And so that's why we read now Mark chapter 1, starting at verse 12. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's Word.

[4 : 31] Our Father in heaven, we thank you again that you have spoken to us, and we ask that you would speak to us clearly this morning by your Word, that you would show us Jesus, that we would understand more who He is, and that you'd encourage us and you'd challenge us to follow Him.

We ask that you do these things by your Spirit, that you would help us do what we cannot do alone, which is to hear from you and to respond. We ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

If you are familiar at all with rock climbing, you know that there's at least two types of climbing you can do. You can do what's called free climbing, or you can do what's called free solo.

And if you're free climbing, it means that you use ropes and you use safety equipment not to help you, but just to protect you. So you're using all your own strength to move up the rock.

The good thing is if you fall, you have a rope to catch you. If you hit the ground, you have a helmet to protect you. Now, free solo, however, is a step beyond that.

[5 : 40] You have to use all your own strength to push yourself up the rock, just like in free climbing. But in free solo, you have no safety equipment. So you don't have any ropes to back you up.

Often, if you see pictures or video of people free soloing, they have no helmet either. And so it is just you and the rock. And you can imagine, obviously, this is extremely dangerous. Less than 1% of people who rock climb will do free soloing because it's basically you have to be crazy to do it.

Now, if you have Disney Plus or Netflix, you probably know where I'm going here. The movie Free Solo came out in 2018, and it tells the story of this man named Alex Honnold whose free solo's El Capitan, which is this 3,200 foot flat, just straight up rock face on Yosemite National Park in California.

And so he does what no one has done before, what is literally crazy. In fact, at some point in the movie, they find out his amygdala doesn't really work. So he doesn't have an appropriate measure of fear like a normal person would.

And we track his time as he's training and preparing to climb up this flat rock face. Now, his friend, Tommy Caldwell, who has his own movie called The Dawn Wall, shows up at various points throughout Free Solo and he tells us this to explain what it is that this man's up against.

[7 : 02] Imagine an Olympic gold medal level achievement that if you don't get that gold medal, you're going to die. That's pretty much what free soloing El Cap is like.

You have to do it perfectly. And then later he tells us, I think everybody who has made free soloing a big part of their life is dead now. And so he lays out the stakes for us.

It is either perfection on the one hand or death on the other. That's what this man is up against. It's a binary choice. He's either going to succeed or he's going to die. And so as it comes to the point in the film where he's actually going to do the climb, his girlfriend, Sunny, leaves town because she can't stand to be there where he's doing the climb.

She just waits with a cell phone so that she can receive news about whether he's been successful or not. Of course, if you've watched it, you know how it ends. He makes it to the top in just under four hours.

And so we see at the very end of the movie this text. On June 3rd, 2017, Alex Honnold becomes the first person to free solo El Capitan. It took him three hours and 56 minutes.

[8 : 12] Now I tell you all this as we come to Jesus' time in the wilderness because Alex does two things here. First of all, he does something that's absolutely perfect. He is able to climb up at a

completely 90 degree straight up rock face for 3,200 feet with no helmet and no ropes.

Not only does he do something that's completely perfect, he also is able to succeed where no one else has been able to. He succeeds where others have failed.

And as we come to this passage this morning in Mark chapter one, we are looking at something very similar. When we talk about Jesus, as I mentioned during our confession of faith this morning, we often talk about the fact that Jesus dies for our sins.

He paid the penalty for our sins. And amen, we believe that's true. That is our hope. What we also need to remember is that Jesus did not just take the punishment we deserve. He also lived the perfect life that we should have lived but did not.

And we see that perfection, that sinlessness of Jesus throughout his life. We're gonna see it throughout the gospel of Mark. We see it in a special way here in this passage because Mark is highlighting for us that Jesus does what is perfect.

[9 : 29] He succeeds where others have failed. And specifically, he succeeds here where the nation of Israel failed. And I'll explain. Remember last week, I talked about the fact that we can hear just a few notes sometimes in the New Testament, and it will pull up for us this whole story from the Old Testament.

Just like Mark did that last week, he's doing it this week as well. And so I invite you to turn back in your worship guide and look at our reading from Deuteronomy chapter eight. And I'm gonna show you this echo here that's happening.

There's this echo that happens between the New Testament and the Old Testament. First of all, Jesus is out in the wilderness for 40 days. You'll see in Deuteronomy chapter eight in verse four, God tells them you were in the wilderness for 40 years.

So Jesus, 40 days being tempted. He's tempted Israel in the wilderness for 40 years. We're told, again, wilderness, by the way, appears in the book of that chapter, that reading three times.

We see it in verse two. We see it in verse 15. We see it in verse 16. If you've been with us for a while, you know that repetition in the Bible really matters. So wilderness here is an idea showing up over and over.

[10 : 37] Same thing in this reading from Mark. We see the word wilderness show up in verse 12 and verse 13. We saw it earlier, by the way. John the Baptist is out baptizing in the wilderness.

So there's this echo of 40 days, 40 years. There's the echo of the wilderness. There's even an echo of wild animals. If you look in verse 15 of Deuteronomy chapter eight, God tells them about the scorpions and the serpents that he saved them from.

Why is Jesus faced with wild animals as well? Look at verse 13. Because he is in the wild and dangerous wilderness, just like Israel.

And if that were not enough, we can also see here, angels were ministering to him. Deuteronomy chapter 16, God talks about how he cared for Israel in the wilderness.

Now, if you think that I'm just making this up and I just happened to find some words that correspond, I'll tell you in Matthew chapter four and Luke chapter four, which are the other passages that talk about Jesus' temptation, Jesus actually quotes directly from Deuteronomy chapter eight.

[11 : 49] And so we're meant to see here this pattern, this incident here that helps us understand what Jesus' ministry will look like. He is going to do perfectly where in the past everyone else has failed.

Jesus is going to do what was previously impossible. Because of course, if you know the story of Israel in the wilderness, you know part of the reason they were wandering for 40 years is because of their lack of faith.

They rebelled against God. As they wandered in the wilderness, they grumbled against God. There were people there who were not allowed to enter the promised land.

They weren't able to go in because of their lack of faith. And so we need to have that background, that understanding as we come to this passage. If you've watched Free Solo, you know there's something strange and foreign and exhilarating about watching this man.

He's literally climbing up a crack. Like you think maybe he's going to have all these holes, but he's not. There's this crack in the wall and he's just wedging his fingers between it to go up 3,200 feet. So there's something that's not real about it.

[12:56] In the same way, there's something not real about what's happening with Jesus here. He is doing what for anyone else would be impossible. He is able in the wilderness for 40 days to withstand this temptation, this opposition.

He's surrounded by animals and he's tempted by Satan here. Oh, I didn't point out another echo. By the way, Deuteronomy 8, verse 2, Jesus talks about testing Israel.

Here we see Jesus is tempted. And so there's an echo there as well. And so that's the point for us first as we look at who Jesus is.

Jesus is the perfect one. Jesus succeeds where Israel failed. Jesus succeeds where we fail as well. Jesus is the one we look to for our perfection.

He is the one we look to for our righteousness. And so that's our first question, right? We're asking who is Jesus? We're also asking how do we respond? By the way, these are not questions that I just came up with.

[13:59] These are the questions that the Gospel of Mark actually asks itself. In Mark chapter 8, Jesus is going to ask his disciples, who do people say that I am? They're going to tell him and then he's going to say, okay, who do you say that I am?

So we're looking forward to that chapter as we ask this question. The question of how we respond is also a question from the Gospel of Mark and also in chapter 8. In chapter 8, verse 34, Jesus says, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.

And so Jesus is saying, you have to respond to who I am. I demand a response. And so that's part of our paradigm as we come over and over. It's from Mark chapter 8 and I want us to think, I'm introducing this new category of 834.

If anyone would come after me, let him take up his cross and follow me. So if Jesus is the perfect one, how are we meant to follow after him? Well, one of the ways that we're going to deny ourselves is that Jesus has to be our perfection.

In other words, we have to find our identity in Jesus more than anything else. We have to find our righteousness in Jesus more than anything else.

[15:13] We have to see him as the one who's obedient for us. And if we don't, we'll fall into one of two traps. First of all, if our identity is not in Jesus, we'll be tempted to find our perfection in ourselves.

There's this question of what motivates someone to be willing to risk their lives so dramatically by climbing up with no ropes 3,200 feet.

And Alex gives us an answer at one point during this documentary. He gives us a couple answers, but I'm just going to tell you one. Now, there's this meditation throughout the film on the nature of death because of course, it's in his face every time he does this, right?

And so he says this, look, I don't want to fall off and die either, but there's a satisfaction to challenging yourself and doing something well. That feeling is heightened when you're for sure facing death.

You can't make a mistake. If you're seeking perfection, free soloing is as close as you can get. And it does feel good to feel perfect for a brief moment.

[16:24] In other words, Alex is looking to himself for perfection. Now, I would imagine most of you, probably none of us, look for perfection in doing death-defying feats.

However, there are all sorts of ways in our lives we look to ourselves to justify ourselves. And it can play out like this. Maybe you're the trash talker.

You're desperately trying to convince yourself that you're okay. The way you do that is you need to talk about other people's failures. If someone else fails more spectacularly than you do, then everything's going to be fine.

You're all right. You are justified. You can find your satisfaction in that. Maybe you're someone who's consumed, not by trash talking about individuals, but about the world.

You're convinced that the world is terrible and it's going to hell in a handbasket. And so if you can talk about that all the time, then obviously you're good by comparison, right? You don't do those things that those people out there do.

[17:28] You don't believe those things that they believe. You're safe. You do all the right things. You are your own justification. Maybe you're a tribalist.

You just know you're not like those terrible conservatives or those terrible liberals. As long as you stay away from them, you'll be okay. And so we're taking God's law, right? And we're reducing it to

something manageable and controllable.

We'll get to the Pharisees, by the way, before too long. Maybe you're someone who's obsessed with always looking right and doing right. Appearances are everything. Okay, no one can come over to your house unless it's absolutely perfect because they can't see that you are anything less than justified.

Maybe you're the performer and the pretender. People are only allowed to get so close to you before they receive the stiff arm because you can't handle other people knowing the truth. And we could go on. But if Jesus is not our perfection, we are tempted to try to be or appear perfect ourselves.

[18 : 37] The other ditch we can fall into, maybe you know you're not perfect and so instead of asking Jesus to be perfect for you and looking to him, you want, you demand other people be perfect for you.

The closer you tie your identity to someone, the harder it is for you to handle failure in them. Now you know this intuitively. There's things that people would do, can do, that you just laugh at, right? You just think that's, or it's not a big deal to you. Maybe that's a little quirky, maybe that's a little silly, but you know, that's just them. But if someone who's related to you does it, the feeling is very different, right?

It's like nails on a chalkboard. What's forgivable in other people is unforgivable in this person. Why? Because you're so tied up in your identity with them, you can't allow them to be anything less than perfect.

It's why there's things that we find endearing in people we know, they're just our friends that we find excruciating about our family members. It's because our identity is tied up in them.

[19 : 42] We need them, in other words, to be perfect for us. So it's hard to show grace for other people's mistakes, right? Because they're making you look bad.

It's what happens when parents drive their kids to success, not because of their desires for them, but because they want the glory that comes. They want people to know, I am the perfect parent. We are the perfect family. And so looking to Jesus as our perfection allows us to actually love the people who are closest to us.

Jesus frees us to be close to imperfect people. Imperfect people like you and me. Of course, this takes us back to Mark 1, verses 1-8.

Remember we said, need is the price of admission. If we want to follow Jesus, we have to admit our need. The question is, how do we do that? One of the ways we do it is we know it's okay to admit our need when we know that Jesus is the one who's perfect for us.

[20 : 52] When we know we can look to his perfect life on our behalf. That's what makes it safe to live a verse 1, 1-8 sort of life.

That's what makes it safe for us to confess our need to God and to others. And so Jesus, he's our perfection. We respond to him by letting him be that for us.

We don't demand it of ourselves. We don't demand it of others. Now we could also talk about following Jesus in suffering here. That's another portion of this passage.

We're going to save that for later in the Gospel of Mark and I'll point you back to this passage because we're going to have plenty of opportunities to talk about that. But as we look at this idea of following Jesus, remember I told you we're going to look at his perfection and his power.

The question is how is it that we look to Jesus? How do we experience him as the one who makes things right rather than everyone else? And Jesus gives us, Mark here gives us a hint.

[21 : 55] There's something I did not talk about last week because there's so much in each of these verses even as our readings are so short that I want to point your attention to this week if you have your Bible open.

I want you to look at verse 11 from last week that comes right before verse 12. Verse 11 says, And a voice came from heaven, You are my beloved son.

With you I am well pleased. Then immediately, verse 12, the Spirit drove him into the wilderness and he was in the wilderness 40 days being tempted by Satan.

Now Mark's narrative is so tight, it's so concise, there is no coincidence here. We are meant to see the contrast, the juxtaposition, the connection between those two verses.

In other words, why is Jesus able to go out into the wilderness and withstand temptation? Jesus goes out and withstands temptation out of his identity and relationship with the Father.

[23 : 01] He hears God's pleasure in him and it's out of that that he's able to remain faithful. Some people have put it this way, even Jesus needed to know his Father was proud of him.

Jesus is acting with the rest of the Trinity. He's not out of relationship with him. We just saw Father, Son, Holy Spirit all at once in verses 8-11. That's why we did the confession of faith last week about the Trinity.

Jesus does this in his relationship. He has a secure attachment and identity with the Father. And so Jesus walks in that as he's faithful in temptation.

That is the power that he has. That he has perfect communion with the Father and the Spirit.

Brothers and sisters, the same is true for us.

Our power comes, our ability to obey comes, our ability to follow Jesus comes as we hear God's voice of pleasure over us.

[24 : 09] In other words, God's grace always comes before obedience. I pointed this out before in our worship service. There's a reason we have the confession of sin and the assurance of pardon before we have the offering.

Because we give as children of God. We don't give to become children of God. Jesus here obeys as a member of the Trinity. He doesn't obey to become a member of the Trinity.

It is his identity and connection and love with the Father that is his power. Now I told you that I was going to give you Alex gives us two reasons he climbs.

One of them is because he wants to be perfect. He loves that feeling for a moment. There's a somewhat darker reason we get some glimpses throughout this documentary into what his life was like growing up.

His mom narrates that his father was distant and often the only thing Alex would heal from his parents was criticism. And then he goes on to talk about what his mom was like.

[25 : 13] He said my mom's favorite sayings are almost doesn't count or good enough isn't. No matter how well I ever do at anything it's not that good.

The bottomless pit of self loathing. I mean that's definitely the motivation for some soloing. In other words Alex's search for perfection comes out of his disconnection from his parents.

He looks to find it in himself because he does not have the voice of his father. Brothers and sisters we do not follow after Jesus to earn God's favor.

We follow after him because we know that we already have it. God does not say to us almost doesn't count.

God does not say to us good enough isn't. God says to us in Christ you are my beloved son.

[26 : 31] God is not to understand Jesus' action in this one. I know some of you have picked up this book called A Theology of Mark by Hans Beyer and he says this talking about God's affirmation of Jesus.

There is great encouragement for the disciples in this affirmation which is not only the affirmation of Jesus as the eternal son of God who is well loved by his father.

Nor is it only the affirmation of the divine glory of Jesus. There is far more to it than for us to simply understand that he is the exalted son of man.

Rather since we are adopted sons and daughters believers benefit from and are included in the father's love for his son.

We indeed receive this profound affirmation from God. we have been brought into a family in which every natural and adopted member receives that kind of love and that inclusion in divine love is based neither on where ask when we come to God is, why did you adopt me? The affirmation of the father's love for the son is thus extended to his adopted children. Brothers and sisters, if you are in Christ, the father's affirmation of his love for the son is extended to you. It's when we hear that, that we're able to put our identity in him rather than anything else. And so who is Jesus?

[28 : 29] Jesus is the perfect one. How do we respond to him? We look to him for perfection. We don't look to ourselves. We don't look to others. Let's pray.

Our father in heaven, we thank you that your word comes and it tells us the truth that if we belong to you, we have your favor. That we don't work to earn or achieve our adoption, but it's simply that it's adoption. You have taken us as your sons and your daughters. And so we're freed from striving and pretending and performing. And instead you offer for us to simply follow after you in love and obedience, knowing that we're secure and there's nothing in heaven and on earth that can separate us from the love that you have for us in Christ. We thank you. It's for this reason we're able to pray

these things. And so we ask them in Jesus name. Amen. I invite you to stand for our closing hymn.